

**70 Forest Street, Apt. 9A
Stamford, CT 06901-1864
March 27, 2022**

Re: Testimony in support of HB-5397 and SB-477

Dear Members of the General Assembly's Public Health Committee:

I am on the board of directors of Connecticut Against Gun Violence and current vice chairman of its board.

It is very encouraging that bills have been introduced that include provisions to address the crisis of community gun violence in Connecticut: HB-5397, SB-477 and SB-16. All have elements worthy of your consideration.

I strongly endorse the language in HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention. It incorporates five important components that should be present in whichever bill is voted out of your committee:

It declares gun violence a public health crisis.

It houses the solution in the Department of Public Health where it can have the greatest impact.

It has mechanisms to include voices of those most impacted by community gun violence.

It includes a robust data gathering and research capacity to drive evidence-informed grant-making.

It calls for funding commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis.

Gun violence is an urgent public health crisis that demands the state invest more to save lives. Last year gun homicides were the highest in 25 years, nearly double the level in 2018.

There's an urgent need to take action: on average, someone in CT is murdered with a gun once every three days.

The governor's bill (SB-16) that calls for the Department of Public Health to establish a gun violence prevention program is welcome, but the legislature needs to do more by passing HB-5397: it needs to ensure there is dedicated, full-time staff in DPH to oversee the effort on a sustained basis, as laid out in the bill. At least a director, grant administrator and support staff (to provide technical assistance, collect data and assess program outcomes) are needed.

Dedicated, full-time, staff in the Department of Public Health are required to engage with community leaders, executive branch agencies, public health policy experts, gun violence prevention advocacy organizations and others with a stake in the health of Connecticut's urban centers. An administrator is needed to establish a grant-making process to provide stable and predictable funding to support violence prevention and intervention programs, including securing federal grants. Other staff are necessary to offer technical expertise and monitor programs to ensure objectives are met. Research expertise is needed to assess the efficacy of programs to ensure that Connecticut follows best practices and implements the highest-impact solutions available, and to create

policy recommendations where existing programs fall short of needs.

States, and larger cities around the country, have established similar offices of violence prevention, with dedicated staff to administer grants to community-based organizations, coordinate violence prevention activities, support policy development, and conduct research and assessments. Some offices go farther by providing direct violence prevention services, such as violence interrupters.

According to the National Offices of Violence Prevention Network that includes 19 jurisdictions (mostly cities), the full-time equivalent staffing for these offices averages 12, from a low of one (Washington State) to a high of 35 (Washington, D.C.). The National OVP Network is run under the auspices of the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform.

According to data provided by the Office of Legislative Research (November 2020), the per capita annual spending on violence prevention programs in states that have offices of violence prevention or dedicated program funding ranges from \$300 per thousand residents to \$3,600/thousand, averaging \$1,250/thousand. Comparable annual spending for Connecticut would be a low of \$1.1 million to a high of \$12.6 million. Connecticut would allocate about \$4.5 million annually on violence prevention programs if it invested at a per capita level matching the average of other states with these programs (NY, CA, IL, MD, PA, NJ, MA).

Solutions need to go beyond strong gun laws and law enforcement; they are necessary but not sufficient to de-escalate conflict and break cycles of violence that too often involve guns.

Evidence-based prevention and intervention programs aimed at individuals at high risk of perpetrating or being victims of gun

violence are demonstrated to reduce shootings and killings in high-violence communities.

I urge you to vote yes on this vitally important legislation to protect the health of our state.

Respectfully,

David P. Atkins

cc: Sen. Patricia Billie Miller
Rep. David Michel